

The Grog Ration

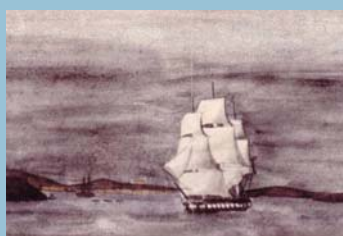
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Navy Medicine in California: The First Ships and Structures (Part I)

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Sloop of War Warren became the first naval medical facility on the west coast.

This image was taken from the book *Naval Sketches of the War in California* by William Meyers.

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Soon after California attained statehood in 1850, Secretary of the Navy William Graham wrote President Fillmore:

We now have a Pacific coast extending for many hundred miles from the confines of Mexico to the far northwest; an inviting country, rapidly populating, totally unfortified, separated by mountains and deserts from the military power of the government. A new empire has, as by magic, sprung into existence. San Francisco promises, at no distant day, to become another New York.

He closed his argument:

A navy yard is very much needed in California, and no time will be lost in accomplishing the work...

Early in 1852, Secretary Graham dispatched a commission of three officers to seek a suitable location for that navy yard. They decided upon Mare Island—which lies protected in the northeast extremity of the San Francisco (San Pablo) Bay—and in 1854 David G. Farragut arrived to establish the facility. The planning map that Farragut brought with him marks out a 600-foot square of land labeled “Grounds for Hospital.” While this was not to be the site ultimately used, it’s clear that a Hospital was “in the works” from the beginning.

Two days after his arrival, CDR Farragut ordered sloop-of-war *Warren*—then at anchor at Sausalito—over to the Island. This ship, with Navy Assistant Surgeon John Mills Browne aboard, became the first Navy “Hospital” on the west coast. *Warren* was small—127 feet in length, 33’9” abeam—and cramped. And she was busy. According to Surgeon B. Reusch Mitchell’s statistical report for the end of 1855, 49 patients were “admitted” at an average daily cost of “3 cents

8 mills & $\frac{1}{10}$ ”.

This space problem was relieved somewhat by the arrival of the frigate *USS Independence* as the Navy Yard Receiving Ship (and *de facto* hospital). While *Independence* was substantially larger than her predecessor, she nevertheless fell short as a proper medical care facility. In a letter to the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery dated 1863 Surgeon William S Bishop complained that the “the frigate *Independence*, particularly in the winter season, is a very unsuitable place to treat the sick. It is cold, wet and open to every wind that blows.” Surgeon Bishop also endorsed and forwarded a letter from Surgeon Harlan, in *USS Saranac*, who wrote “—a better shelter is needed [for the patients] than a ship off San Francisco, where gusts of cold wind make every invalid shudder. If you can have a hospital or apartment suited to protect these sufferers, I beg you to present the case to the Commodore of the [Mare Island Navy] yard, so that the men can be immediately sent up...”

Congress dithered, despite urgings for funding from BUMED Chief William Whelan. With no money forthcoming for a hospital, Whelan, who was sympathetic to the needs of the far distant station, recommended, among other expedencies, that a temporary hospital be constructed in *Independence*. Surgeon Bishop resisted this idea because it would too seriously interfere with the other functions served by the receiving ship. And besides, his was a growing constituency. Not just the sailors of the Pacific Squadron, but the newly arrived Marine Battalion constituted his medical responsibilities. He needed a proper on-shore facility. When Whelan recommended that the ill be sent to the Marine (now Public Health) Hospital, a 25-mile boat-ride...



A 1852 graduate of the Medical Department of Harvard University, Dr. Browne joined the Navy a year later. His first assignment was the *Warren*. He later oversaw the construction of the first official Navy hospital at Mare Island, and was its first Surgeon-in-Charge. He went on to become Surgeon General of the Navy in 1888. (BUMED Archives)

"Navy officials didn't like the idea of sending sailors over to San Francisco. They were inclined to disappear once they were cured at the Marine Hospital."

Navy Medicine in California: The First Ships and Structures (Cont' d)

away in San Francisco, the Commandant of the Yard, Thomas Selfridge, replied, "The seamen of the Pacific Squadron have been admitted into the Marine Hospital at San Francisco, but they have universally, for some reasons unexplained, been very much disappointed." What he failed to add was that Navy officials didn't like the idea of sending sailors over to San Francisco. They were inclined to disappear once they were cured at the Marine Hospital.

Unhappy with Washington's slow response to local medical needs, Commandant Selfridge took matters into his own hands, writing to the Bureau of Yards and Docks in June 1863, "There is a wooden building in the yard, formerly the old storehouse, one and a half stories high measuring 30 by 23 which at very moderate expense could be converted to [medical] use as it will require but little else besides partitioning off outhouses and a fence thrown around it. This house has been used as a granary near the stables, but...it is altogether too large for this purpose..." Selfridge received approval for this granary conversion project in July and set promptly to the work.

Just a few months later,

in January 1864, the Commandant directed Surgeon Bishop to procure the appliances necessary "to receive patients in the temporary Hospital." In his report to the Bureau, Bishop noted



First (Temporary) Hospital, Mare Island, CA (1864-1871).

that "...though the Commandant's plan of constructing the temporary Hospital was not the one that I would have adopted, he has succeeded in making a very convenient place for twenty or thirty patients." On 23 February, Selfridge wrote "I have to report that the temporary Hospital is now open for patients". The day was "clear, warm & pleasant, Light wind from the S.W."

Less than a month later, Surgeon Bishop had purchased—and filled—15 beds, and he ordered 12 more. A month later, the thrifty medical officer reported that he had filled the positions of cook and nurse with "two patients on my sick list"; he put convalescents to work performing laundry duty "at very great saving of expense".

John Browne returned to Mare Island in May 1865 to take command of a facility now grown to 30 beds. Browne seems to have been less interested in economy than he was in running a

professional operation: he promptly requested permission to hire a permanent cook, writing that "under the present arrangements the cooking at the Hospital is performed by the voluntary act of patients. This method, hitherto effected without additional expense, is obviously unreliable and subjects the hospital to the will of its patients

in this respect." The Bureau gave a quick OK: "at the Naval Hospital, Navy Yard Mare Island of one cook at \$45 per month," and for "two nurses at \$28 per month", but with the admonition that "the number of nurses will be retained only when the crowded state of the hospital makes it necessary."

This temporary hospital continued to provide a secure place for medical and surgical aid to sailors, Marines and navy yard workers for seven years while the first "official" hospital slowly took form and substance.

(To be continued in the Sept-Oct issue)

Physical Readiness According to Teddy

Story by Jan K. Herman

That Theodore Roosevelt was fanatical about physical fitness is well known. Plagued by asthma and other maladies in his youth, Roosevelt had spent his adult years building his body by rigorous exercise and the outdoor life. Rancher, sportsman, big game hunter, explorer, and Rough Rider, the 26th President became the nation's leading advocate of what he called "the strenuous life."

Shortly before leaving the White House following his second term, Roosevelt, a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, considered adopting an annual physical test to determine the fitness of Navy officers. The Army already had such a test in which officers of the rank of major and above, except for major generals, were required annually to walk 50 miles or ride 100 miles in 3 consecutive days.

After much discussion, the Bureau of Navigation drafted instructions for such a test and submitted them to the President. Roosevelt then sought the counsel of his White House physician and friend, Surgeon General of the Navy Presley M. Rixey. Dr. Rixey, an avid riding companion of the president, decided to do the Army one better. He told Roosevelt he would ride the 100 miles in 1 day rather than 3. Never one to miss an opportunity to test his physical mettle, Roosevelt said he would go along. One can almost hear the Chief Executive exclaiming, "A bully idea!," as he squinted gleefully beneath his spectacles.

Concerned for his patient's health and the possibility of an accident, RADM Rixey vigorously tried to dissuade Roosevelt from going along but all protestations were for naught. This was an adventure not to be missed.

Dr. Rixey secured maps to Warrenton, VA, some 52 miles southwest of Washington and arranged for securing fresh horses along the way.

On the dark, cold morning of 13 January 1909, Roosevelt, Rixey, Army CAPT Archibald W. Butt, LT Carey Grayson, MC, USN, and several body guards mounted cavalry horses and began their ride.* With the mercury hovering near 30 degrees, they changed mounts at Fairfax Court House, at a farm-

house near Manassas, and again at Buckland, arriving in Warrenton at 12 noon.

The news of the President's visit spread like wildfire. Schools were let out and soon crowds thronged the top of Court House Hill. Retired Navy physician Dr. John Wise, a personal friend of Roosevelt, welcomed the Presidential party and hosted a luncheon at the Warren Green Hotel.

The President and his companions began their ride back to Washington at 1:20. Changing horses at the same stops along the way, they retraced their journey. At Centreville the threatening overcast that had obscured the sun all day finally turned to precipitation. In a letter written to CAPT Butt, Roosevelt reminded the young officer of their winter adventure: *A blinding sleet storm drove in our faces, and from Fairfax Court-House, we were in pitch darkness going over the frozen roads through the sleet storm. You and Dr. Rixey alternately led the way and set the pace. You as well as the rest of the party returned in fine condition, convincing me of the fact that the test provided for the army and navy was not excessive.*

After riding the last 30 miles in the teeth of the storm, the party reached the White House at 8:40 p.m., none the worse for wear, if we take the President's account at face value. None of the others left an account, but 16 hours in the saddle must have provided several days of aching muscles. As his companions learned the hard way, exercise, according to Teddy, was not to be taken lightly.

**Archibald Butt was an influential aide to Presidents Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. In 1912, after a six week vacation in Europe, he boarded the ocean liner RMS Titanic. On April 14 Titanic struck an iceberg and sank the next morning, claiming some 1,500 victims, including Archibald Butt. After the disaster stories circulated about Archibald Butt's heroics on the doomed ship.*



President Roosevelt responded to Warrenton's hospitality by sending the town this photograph of himself dressed in hunting clothes. The photo, in the collection of the Warrenton Public Library, was taken from a painting by Gari Melchers. (Courtesy of Warrenton Public Library)

Did you know?

Presley Marion Rixey served as Surgeon General of the Navy (1902-1910) and physician to President Roosevelt (1901-1908). Dr. Rixey's last residence still stands today and presently serves as the "Main Building" at Marymount University, Arlington, VA.

A Few Notes on Grog

What does one do with a drunken sailor? Maybe this is not a question that Heraclites pondered as he crossed the same river twice, but this certainly was an issue that perplexed many in the 19th century U.S. Navy, during the so-called days of “grog” rationing. Hard to believe there was a time when our ships carried alcohol as a more salubrious substitute to plain water. Just as there were rations of food, there was a ration of “grog,” a mixture of alcohol (usually rum or whisky) and water. The exact origin of this peculiarly named concoction dates back to the 1740s and British Admiral Edward Vernon, a man known throughout the British Navy as “Old Grog” for his habit of wearing a grogan cloak. Besides serving as the namesake of George Washington’s estate on the Potomac River “Old Grog” was purportedly the first to order a daily half pint of rum mixed with a quart of water to remedy the



“Old Grog” Admiral Edward Vernon (1684-1757) of the British Royal Navy. (Courtesy National Maritime Museum)

abuses of rum drinking.

Along with flogging, and the use of the oak leaf as a symbol, many of the practices of the British fleet were incorporated into the early U.S. Navy. In staying this course, Congress approved a rum ration for Navy vessels that was soon substituted by grog. This did little to dampen the flaring temperance movement that sought eradication of all alcohol on naval vessels. In 1810, taking heed to the opposition to grog, Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton proposed that grog



A grog tub from the USS Constitution. Until 1854 it was common practice to issue spirits to the crew twice a day from tubs like these.

be forfeited by men for minor infractions of discipline. In addition, all losses of pay as the result of a court martial were to be sent to the Navy Hospital Fund to establish hospitals exclusively for men of the Navy.

Grog rations were deemed the cause of many evils aboard ships. It was even blamed for the brutal practice of flogging (*again, what does one do with a drunken sailor?*) Throughout the 1820s, temperance groups besieged Congress petitioning for the abolishment of the grog ration in the Army and Navy to the extent that Congress asked Secretary of the Navy John Branch to institute an inquiry into the effects of grog on midshipmen. Three of the most prominent Navy surgeons of the day, Lewis Heermann, William P.C. Barton, and Thomas Harris spearheaded this investigation and came to the conclusion that the ration was unnecessary and harmful to morals and health. Harris went so far as to say that tea and coffee should be substituted, but conceded that many old sailors would never agree to it. Not long after, in the pamphlet “Practical Reflections upon the Grog Ration of the U.S.,” Navy physician William Wood argued that the ration made men irritable, promoted insecurity, was physically harmful, and was directly or indirectly responsible for diseases that placed chronic invalids in hospitals at gov-

ernment expense. This was not to mention that it, also, constituted a fire hazard on board frigates.

Beginning in 1831, Levi Woodbury, the new Secretary of the Navy, issued a circular stating that all persons wishing to relinquish their rations be compensated 6 cents per ration (or roughly a dollar a month) hoping that greed would be an addiction outweighing alcoholism. Truth be told, grog’s days of glory were numbered. In 1842, under the pressure of temperance groups, the Navy cut the grog ration in half and substituted coffee, cocoa, tea, and even pickles!* Sailors under 21 were altogether prohibited from any form of alcohol.

Grog’s official death knell rang out on 14 July 1862, by a General Order approved by Congress. According to the Order, which became effective on 1 September 1862, “the spirit ration in the Navy of the United States shall forever cease, and thereafter no distilled spirituous liquors shall be admitted on board vessels-of-war, except as medical stores and upon the order and under the control of the medical officers of such vessels, and to be used only for medical purposes.” Somehow, this did not minimize the abuse of alcohol in the fleet. The Navy needed another general order (GO of July 1914) “strictly” prohibiting alcohol aboard all Navy vessels. **ABS**

***The Salubriousness of the Pickle.**
According to the *Philadelphia Journal of Health*, September 8, 1830:

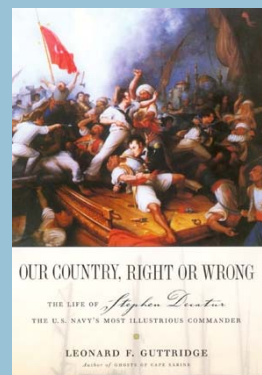
By the individual in perfect health, the same bad effects, therefore, are to be anticipated from the use of pickles, excepting in very minute quantities, as from indulgence in every other superfluous condiment...to the dyspeptic, or the invalid from any cause, the indigestible nature of pickles...renders their introduction into the stomach, in any quantity, productive of the most serious injury. Pickles are to be included, also, among those articles from the use of which children are to be strictly prohibited.

Scuttlebutt: Maritime History Happenings

SHNM Announces 1st Annual Meeting and Paper Session. The recently founded Society for the History of Navy Medicine announces its first Annual Meeting and Paper Session, to be held during the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine in Montreal, 3 - 6 May 2007. The Society solicits papers concerning any aspect of the history of medicine in the maritime environment (including above and below the surface of water). Graduate student work and other "works-in-progress" are particularly encouraged. Electronic submission of a 200-250 word abstract is particularly welcomed, though faxed or mailed submissions will be accepted. If interested, please send your paper proposals to:

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Coming soon to your local bookstore. Tom Doherty Associates has recently announced the publication of *Our Country, Right or Wrong: The Life of Stephen Decatur*. In this biography, Leonard F. Guttridge, who also wrote *Icebound* and *Ghosts of Cape Sabine*, offers freshly discovered documents that shed new light into the personal affairs of the hero of the Barbary Wars. The book promises to be an essential read for any fan of naval medical history. Navy surgeons William P.C. Barton and Lewis Heermann each played a significant role in the career of Commodore Decatur. In addition, two Navy physicians—Bailey Washington and Samuel Russell Trevett—were on hand in Bladensburg that fateful day in 1820 when Decatur met his demise in a duel with Commodore Barron's pistol. *Our Country, Right or Wrong: The Life of Stephen Decatur* will be available in October 2006.



A History of the Naval Museum of Hygiene. The Office of the Historian has just completed a history of the Navy's long-overlooked medical museum. In operation from 1882-1905, the Museum of Hygiene was said to have rivaled the Parkes Museum (of Hygiene) in London, and later spawned the Navy Medical School. Digital copies can be obtained by writing to ABSobocinski@us.med.navy.mil

Attention on deck! In the 1960s, Naval Hospital Oakland, CA established a drug and alcohol treatment program known as "Project 49." The Office of the Historian is looking for persons who helped administer this unique program. If you have, or if you know someone with, knowledge of the Navy's Project 49, please contact: ABSobocinski@us.med.navy.mil